DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 192 901 PS 011 725

AUTHOR Seltzer, Michelle Seligson
TITLE Family Day Care and the School-Age Child.
PUB DATE Jun 79
NOTE 8p.; Paper presented at School's Out! A Conference on Day Care for the School-Age Child (Boston, MA, June 15-16, 1979). For other papers from this conference, see PS 011 714-726.

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Administrators; *After School Day Care; *Attitudes; *Child Caregivers; Day Care Centers; Elementary School Students; *Extension Education; *Family Day Care; Workshops

ABSTRACT

This paper provides portions of a workshop discussion at the Wheelock Conference on School-Age Child Care concerning the role of family day care for school-age children. The workshop participants included family day care providers affiliated with the day care system in the Greater Boston area, administrators of a family day care system which also operates a school-age day care program, and others working in the child care field who were especially interested in day care for school-age children. Issues discussed were: how well suited is the family day care home for the school-age child's growing need for autonomy and mobility? How much freedom can providers afford to allow an older child if they have their hands full with caregiving for preschoolers or babies as well as managing a household? What are the legal implications for a provider who may not be available to supervise an older child who is hurt in a playground accident or in a street fight with older children? Can a family day care home provide "creative programming" to meet the developing interests and skills of the older child? Participants concurred on several issues. Topics agreed upon included the following: the potential for nurturance that exists in a family day care setting; the importance of knowing the limits of one's ability to deal with special needs children; and the significant difference that the family day care home can make in the lives of children who experience stressful times in their development. (Author/MP)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
Michelle Seligson Seltzer
TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION
THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY

ED192901

PS011725

Family Day Care and the School-Age Child

Michelle Seligson Seltzer*

Co-Director, School-Age Child Care Project, Center for Research on Women, Wellesley College, Wellesley, Massachusetts

Introduction

In recent years there has been increased awareness of the needs of the school-age child -- before school, after school, and at other times when parents are working and need care for their children. Most discussion of the subject seems to focus on group care, in after-school programs designed to serve large groups of children. However, family day care is and has always been an important alternative for children, including those of school age. The reasons that parents choose to place a child with a caregiver in the neighborhood are varied. There may be no formal day care center available. A family day care home may be preferred because it is close to the child's home, because siblings can attend together, because attendance costs are reasonable, or because parents perceive family day care as an intimate setting in which their children can experience a home-like feeling on their return from school. Some parents of children with special needs may opt for family day care because there is no alternative readily available which is staffed adequately to care for their children. Family day care may offer the school-age child an opportunity to participate in neighborhood activities, to play with schoolmates in the local playground, to develop relationships with the provider's own children and with younger children in his or her care, and in general, to become a part of a family unit involved in the everyday tasks and activities which are part of family life.

Some questions do arise about how well suited the family day care home may be to the school-age child's growing need for autonomy and mobility. How much freedom can providers afford to allow an older child if they have their hands full with caregiving for preschoolers or babies as well as managing a household? What are the legal implications for a provider who may not be available to supervise an older child who is hurt in a playground accident or in a street fight with older children? Finally, can a family day care home provide "creative programming" to meet the developing interests and skills of the older child?

These and other issues were discussed by a group of participants in a workshop at the Wheelock Conference on School-Age Child Care.* The workshop participants included family day care providers affiliated with

---

*The author would like to thank the workshop participants for ther contribution to this article.

family day care systems in the Greater Boston area, administrators of a family day care system which also operates a school-age day care center, and others working in the child care field who were especially interested in day care for the school-age child. In this article, portions of the workshop discussion will be presented in an attempt to capture the flavor of the dialogue about the role of family day care for school-age children.

Participants' Observations

If there was one point upon which all participants agreed, it was the potential for nurturance that exists in a family day care setting. This was expressed by one participant, a family day care provider, who perceived her "extended family" in the following way:

> Mostly it's nice that you're there when they come back from school and you can listen to what their needs are and try to zero in on them and maybe follow through. It might be that one little fellow that we had wasn't really into sports so much. He was great with writing and drama and we had a little girl in the home at the same time who was a great actress. So we put our kids up in the library and they did their little thing up there which was great. We had another boy who was just fantastic at baseball; he was into Little League and he would come home and tell us all about it. We had another little boy and he was just great for Jerry, our Little League ball player. He taught Sam how to play ball. A little bit of all the children rubs off on all the other children . . . I think as a day care provider you love the children as your own. And when they hit a home run you're thrilled. You're thrilled when they come home and read you the story they did at the library. You're just thrilled with them, period.

This woman not only saw her own contribution to the lives of the children in her care, but felt that her family itself was enriched by the presence of other children in their everyday lives. For her, family day care offered an opportunity to do productive work for others as well as to receive substantial personal reward.

How do the provider's own children feel about their parent's relationship with other children who come into their home each day? One provider related her experience as one in which everyone in the family gained:

> I have my kids say to me, "You give more attention to Carolyn than you do the others." But we talked about it, so for me that was a growth experience, and it was so we could see that all children are different and need different things. And my children grew because they could say, "We understand this." And they verbalized it.

Being a family day care provider is not always easy, but as another provider (previously an elementary school teacher in the public school system) pointed out, the frustrations of the work are often balanced by the rewards.

> They [children] need nurturing and attention, that is what family day care can do better than any other system. The second day I was into family day care my husband found me in bed crying. The dog had cut his paw, one of my day care kids was in the hospital with suspected muscular dystrophy, and a third had come in from first grade and ripped all the curtains off, and I thought, "I can't do this!" It was the most difficult job and the most rewarding. I thought I had a sensitivity to kids before I took this job. I can't explain how I changed as a person from this job. It just did me more of a favor; it was the most rewarding.

Family day care providers experience a unique relationship with the parents of the children in their care: the provider quoted above felt differently about parents as a family day care giver then she had as an elementary school teacher:

> When I was a young teacher I thought the worst part of teaching was parents. They would just leave me alone. I came to day care with a suburban attitude. And the attitude was why didn't mothers stay home like I had always done to take care of their little children? I ended up with a great respect for parents who are trying to make it, sometimes against incredible odds and who need you sometimes as much as they need their kids to have care . . . I had one mother who called me up at 8 o'clock one night and asked what kind of pants did I buy for my three sons. That is one area that you have to learn to deal with again and again.

Conversely, one of the workshop participants, a day care administrator whose school-age child was being cared for in a family day care home, offered a parent's perspective of family day care:

> As a parent in a family day care arrangement, the tie that I have with the women who cares for my child is a very close one. That person is spending about eight hours a day with Joseph, knows all of the events that occur in the course of his daily life and could talk about them in a sincere way -- how they relate to another child or her own child. The view that we have is of a very secure arrangement.

Further comments indicated that parents may feel freer to discuss a child's problems with a family day care provder than with a teacher in a school situation. As one participant stated:

> We all have feelings about schools as institutions, feelings very often of anxiety when we have to go to a school to talk to a second grade teacher about our child because of our own sort of personal hidden agenda on school and what it meant to us!

Children with special needs requiring one-to-one care may gain a great deal from being in a family day care home. However, it was acknowledged by the workshop participants that some children may be too much to handle and that it is important to know the limits of one's ability to deal with such children: with special needs

I had Daniel for over a year and eventually he had to be let go because he became so abusive to himself and others. But what I would try to do was always be tuned into Daniel. Now this is very difficult because you had two coming home from school. I had Daniel and sometimes I had another one . . . but I really think I developed a way to handle this. Often times Daniel and I would go to the bathroom and he would have his tantrum. He really needed family day care. He could not exist in a large after-school program. He just never would have survived. He would tear the school apart, he would run away from school. The point I guess I want to make is that Daniel knew that I loved him, no matter what he did, he knew that my family loved him and that I loved him. I think that helped him. Now, as a public school teacher, I have one child who comes into school at 7:30 every morning. We cannot get rid of him in the afternoon. He wanders the streets until 8:30 every night. But if I put my arms around him, that is all he wants, and yet everyone in the system has named him as a street kid and trouble. This kid desperately needs some kind of family situation.

The situations described here imply the necessity for an intense and careful response to children's needs. I would argue that system-affiliated family day care, rather than individual day care providers working in isolation, best meets these needs by alleviating some of the stress placed on working parents in locating care and by insuring high quality control for parents, children, and provider. The family day care providers in the workshop discussion were affiliated with family day care systems in their communities. While it is estimated that family day care is the most widely used form of child care across the country, only 5% of all children in day care are in family day care homes affiliated with a system which provides administrative and social service support, education and training. As one family day care system administrator put it:

Quality control is more difficult with family day care because they're all out there in the field and you don't see them all the time. There are three factors that are directly related to that issue. One is selection. Selection is the most important factor in establishing quality family day care programs. Second is home visiting which is a combination of monitoring and providing support, and the third factor is training, which is no more than a refining process because if you haven't done a good job with selection then your training isn't going to do a lot. The average contact with homes is more than once a week. The contact takes on a number of flavors. There is to some extent an element of monitoring quality but more importantly there is the consultative relationship that is established.

The people from central services are there as resource people, people who can give assistance to develop new programs and meet very concrete needs in terms of working with a parent-provider relationship. We are involved in a continuous evaluation process where we take independent parent evaluations, both formal written evaluations and informal interview evaluations, and then the providers participate in the process.

> There is a fourth item that is extremely important, second only to selection of providers, and that is careful placement. Parents are constantly calling and saying, "I started work yesterday, can you take my kid on Monday," and you say, "No, it takes three or four weeks to make a good placement," and that causes a lot of visits, taking the child to the provider, the parent to the provider, the child to the other children and so on. Three people have to accept placement -- the parent, the provider, and we have to accept it and you observe the child and how he or she reacts and a child will let you know too. The parent is making a choice but the kid is making a choice too.

Homes connected with each other through a system can be an enormous source of support to family day care givers. This "network of reciprocity" of ideas, tasks, and information adds an important dimension to the everyday work of taking care of children:

> We built up this great friendship between day care mothers, and this other woman became very friendly with me and we had this mixed group that would meet with school-age children as well as younger children and we would go to a beach sometimes, and she would watch the big ones and I would take care of the little ones. We would also go to the park and she would watch mine and I would watch hers.

Such mutuality can form the basis for placement decisions by system administrators:

> The clustering of homes is something which enters into decisions that we make about placements of school-age kids. Particularly, our interest is to see that they are in areas where they are going to be in contact with friends from school or where they are going to establish some relationships with kids so that there will be some free play or some free movement available between homes out of the cooperative relationship between caregivers.

Family day care systems can make a significant difference in the lives of children who experience stressful times in their development. The system approach to networking resources, sharing information, and building consistent problem-solving mechanisms was illustrated by one provider as follows:

> There was one child whom I had for six years, Hector, and he is a child who would have slipped through the cracks and been lost if he had been in any situation other than family day care. He was a child whom I watched when he would have to stay a half-hour after school and another boy would be waiting there to beat him up. He was a boy who was getting kicked out of boy scouts; a lunchroom aide was quitting because she couldn't stand him. His mother was throwing her hands up in disgust. He was just one of those kids, but he was the most loving kid if you gave him a chance, of all the kids I've ever known. And because he went into day care and we could see the things that were happening to

him, all of a sudden I said, "I don't think I could stand in that kid's shoes, what are we going to do?" So between Robert (the System Director), I, and the other staff, they went to the school principal and got the whole big conglomeration started -- it was almost like Chapter 766* before it started -- and we got help for Hector who was acting out in school because he wouldn't give anyone the satisfaction of saying, "I can't do it." And he was the most creative kid with building things. We used to reward him with building things and it was like a miracle had happened because next year this Hector who was a drop out for sure, got an A in science. Today Hector is fourteen years old and he is going into a vocational school because he can do so many things with his hands. And he's the type of child that even till today when I went to his fourteenth birthday party, he gave me a kiss and said, "I've never outgrown it."

As the workshop discussion developed, it became clear that the concept of creative programming, so much a part of the thinking and planning in school-age, center-based programs, was perceived as an integral part of everyday activities in the family day care home. While recognizing the importance of allowing children access to different experiences outside of the home, providers expressed the view that children needed and wanted to be a part of an environment which as much as possible approximated a real family setting. Systems which operate a center as well as satellite family day care add an extra favorable dimension to the home setting by providing kids with opportunities to engage in some structured activities to which they would not ordinarily have access due to transportation problems, additional costs, and the limited supervisory time of the family day care provider whose time has to be shared by younger children in her care.

One provider remarked that older children need to be part of a community -- mowing a lawn for example, or washing a car. These children need to feel that their input is valuable not only to their own families but also to the community in general. In designing a program for center-based, school-age day care, consideration should be given to these activities as well as to the unplanned and naturally occurring experiences often found in family day care homes. The comments of two workshop participants seem pertinent to this argument. The first comments by a day care provider illustrate the value of a relaxed, home base atmosphere, while the second set of comments by an administrator of a school-age center (which had added satellite family day care to the center program) indicates how the above considerations can form the basis of the programming process.

Do we have to structure everything kids do? I think we need to teach them how to play, to be able to sit, and be quiet; to just "hang out" or get into dramatic play. I had one child who would take a sleeping bag and cuddle up in a corner in my dining room. Somehow I feel that that would not have happened in a center-based program. She would not have had the freedom to find out what was hers.

---

*Massachusetts legislation mandating special education services.

We defined the goals of our school-age program as trying to provide experience for the children that is similar to what they would normally experience -- going home from school, throwing their jacket on the floor and taking off to play for a while. And then a number of times a week they would go to the after-school children's program or cub scouts or girl scouts, brownie troop, or to a recreational program -- baseball or basketball. We tried to base our programs on where a child would go on different days, and we used parents to chauffeur the kids back and forth.

Providing an environment in which kids can feel part of the community and the neighborhood is difficult. Family day care providers expressed concern about the tension between wanting to allow kids freedom to, for example, ride their bikes in the local playground, and fearing their liability should an accident occur -- liability with respect to both legal and emotional issues.

You never see a parent sued if they send their kid to the store and he gets hurt, but if it's a center or a family day care home, then they feel that you are negligent. It seems that if you're willing to take the risks with other children that you take with your own children, and you take normal risks in sending them to the store, then you could be open to liability.

Insurance liability coverage can offer some security for those operating family day care systems and for associations of independent providers. Release forms are also a necessity, although it is unclear how much weight a parent release form has in court should a provider be sued in a negligence action. Insurance costs are drastically increasing. In Massachusetts in 1979, insurance for family day care homes quadrupled because of alleged abuse cases associated with some foster care homes. According to one family day care system director, these incidents have caused insurance companies to "drop family day care like a hot potato, and those of us who renewed our insurance then had to pay four times as much."

Centers serving school-age children may also experience some of the same difficulties: if a center-based program defines "normalcy" as one goal for children coming to a day care center after school, then that center is faced with the same concerns about setting limits as is the family day care provider.

We can't let one person go here, another go there. There are too many children and not enough staff and not enough transportation, and the transportation costs in a group program are incredible. We find that we have to bring all fifteen kids down to the music program! It is a terrific program but not all fifteen kids are highly motivated for it. So we let some kids stand by and then we have another problem. Several more want to stay back and then nobody wants to go. This is the underlying tension. Most of the time when we get there everybody enjoys it -- but it's not natural.